

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-12

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 OMB-01 AID-20 EB-11 CIAE-00 DODE-00

PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-03 RSC-01

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R 010947Z AUG 73 ZDK
FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5906
INFO AMCONSUL BOMBAY
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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, IN

SUBJ: PRESIDENT DENOUNCES CORRUPTION AND VIOLENCE

SUMMARY: IN A WIDELY-REPORTED SPEECH, PRESIDENT GIRI LASHED OUT AT CORRUPT POLITICIANS AND AT PARTIES WHICH TOLERATE OR SUPPORT THEM. CALLING PRESENT DIFFICULTIES "THE GREATEST CRISIS" INDIA HAD FACED SINCE INDEPENDENCE, HE CALLED ON ELECTED AND APPOINTED LEADERS TO VISIT RURAL AREAS AND REDRESS GRIEVANCES. HE REGRETTED THAT DESPITE THE PRIME MINISTER'S BEST EFFORTS, CONGRESS MAJORITIES HAD NOT YIELDED PROMISED RESULTS. SOME SAW GIRI'S REMARKS AS DIRECTED AGAINST THE CONGRESS AND, INDIRECTLY, THE PRIME MINISTER. OTHERS THOUGHT THEM CONSISTENT WITH HER POSITION. END SUMMARY.

1. INAUGURATING A GANDHI BHAVAN AT LUCKNOW JULY 28, CONSTITUTIONALLY NON-POLITICAL AND USUALLY SOPORIFIC PRESIDENT GIRI REPORTEDLY DEPARTED FROM HIS PREPARED TEXT AND DELIVERED AN EMOTIONAL DENUNCIATION OF THE MANY EVILS AFFLICTING INDIA TODAY. FACED WITH INDIA'S "GREATEST CRISIS" IN 25 YEARS, HE SAID, POLITICIANS ABETTED FOOD HOARDERS

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AND ADULTERATORS AND INDULGED IN "CORRUPTION, NEPOTISM,

FAVORITISM, COMMUNALISM, AND EVERYTHING ELSE". HE URGED POLITICAL PARTIES NOT TO NOMINATE AND VOTERS NOT TO SUPPORT CORRUPT LEGISLATORS. "OUR LEGISLATORS ARE ANXIOUS TO RETAIN THEIR SEATS. BUT NOBODY IS INTERESTED IN GOING TO THE VILLAGES AND TOWNS TO KNOW THE PROBLEMS OF THE PEOPLE". INVOKING HIS SPECIAL POWERS WHILE UTTAR PRADESH IS UNDER PRESIDENT'S RULE, HE "ORDERED" HIS ADVISERS AND SECRETARIES "TO PUT HOARDERS IN CHAINS". HE REGRETTED THAT RELIGION, CASTE, AND LANGUAGE-INSPIRED VIOLENCE WAS RISING. APPARENTLY IN PASSING, HE STATED THAT "INSPIRE OF HER BEST EFFORTS", THE LARGE MAJORITIES WHICH THE PRIME MINISTER HAD SOUGHT AND RECEIVED IN THE ELECTIONS HAD NOT YIELDED THE PROMISED RESULTS. "THINGS ARE NOT MOVING AS THEY SHOULD". (NO TRANSCRIPT OR TEXT OF GIRI'S REMARKS WILL BE AVAILABLE, ACCORDING TO HIS PRESS SECRETARY.)

2. REACTION TO THE SPEECH WAS MIXED. THE BIRLAS' "HINDUSTAN TIMES", IN A FRONT-PAGE STORY ENTITLED "GIRI'S ACCUSING FINGER RATTLES RULING PARTY", ARGUED THAT THE CRITICISM OF THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE CONGRESS WAS "DIRECT AND UNSPARING". EDITORIALY, IT FOUND THE SPEECH "IN A SENSE UNPRECEDENTED" (GIRI HAD NOT SPOKEN OUT BEFORE, BUT HIS PREDECESSORS DID VERY RARELY). "PRESUMABLY, TOO, HE HAS CONFIDED HIS ANXIETIES TO THE PRIME MINISTER AND HAS NOW FELT IT NECESSARY TO GO BEYOND THAT AND ADDRESS THE PEOPLE", "HINDUSTAN TIMES" SURMISED. "INDIAN EXPRESS" CALLED THE SPEECH "A SEVERE INDICTMENT OF THE CONGRESS" PRO-JANA SANGH "MOTHERLAND", UNDER THE TITLE "GIRI IS ROARING", CALLED IT "THE RIGHT THING AT THE WRONG TIME": TOO LATE, AND THEREFORE "PATHETIC". IN PARLIAMENT JULY 30, OPPOSITION SPEAKERS TRIED BUT FAILED TO GET THE SPEAKER TO PERMIT DEBATE ON THE SPEECH, ESPECIALLY THE CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUE OF WHETHER OR NOT GIRI'S REMARKS CONSTITUTED GOVERNMENT POLICY. "KNOWLEDGEABLE SOURCES" WERE QUOTED IN THE "TIMES OF INDIA" JULY 31 THAT THE PRESIDENT'S REMARKS HAD "NO POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE" AND WERE "IN NO WAY MEANT AS CRITICISM OF THE PRIME MINISTER". AUGUST 1 PAPERS CARRIED REPORTS THAT UTTAR PRADESH OFFICIALS, RESPONDING TO GIRI'S ORDERS, INSTITUTED A COMPULSORY WHEAT LEVY AND WILL PROSECUTE HOARDERS AND PROFITEERS UNDER THE DEFENSE OF INDIA RULES, THE MAINTENANCE OF INTERNAL SECURITY ACT, AND THE ESSENTIAL LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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COMMODITIES ACT. THERE IS, NONETHELESS, A CONSTITUTIONAL QUESTION WHETHER THE PRESIDENT CAN, WITHOUT CABINET "ADVICE" AND WITHOUT WORKING THROUGH THE HOME MINISTRY, ISSUE DIRECT ORDERS TO OFFICIALS.

3. PRIVATE REACTION TO THE PRESIDENT'S VEHEMENCE VARIED. SOME POLITICIANS AND JOURNALISTS DISMISSED IT AS AN ATTEMPT TO BUILD SUPPORT FOR ANOTHER TERM AS PRESIDENT;

THEY NOTED THAT HE CAREFULLY SPARED THE PRIME MINISTER, WHO
HERSELF MIGHT WELL USE THE CAMPAIGN THEME THAT CORRUPT
POLITICIANS HAD UNDERMINED HER BEST EFFORTS. DESPITE
HIS AGE (79 IN AUGUST), HIS WIFE IS RUMORED TO WANT A SECOND
TERM. OLD ACQUAINTANCES OF THE PRESIDENT ARGUED THAT HE
WAS SINCERELY MOVED BY RISING VIOLENCE, THE SUFFERING OF
THE POOR MASSES, THE SLOWNESS OF ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM
IN UTTAR PRADESH, AND ALLEGED WIDESPREAD LAWLESSNESS
RANGING FROM RURAL LEGISLATORS' REFUSAL TO SELL GRAIN
TO THE GOVERNMENT TO ACTIVE CONNIVANCE AT VARIOUS FORMS
OF CORRUPTION. HE WAS NOT ATTACKING THE PRIME MINISTER, THEY
SAID, BUT RATHER SAYING WHAT SHE FELT BUT COULD NOT VOICE.
SCHNEIDER

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TAGS: PINT, IN, (GIRI, V)
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